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MRS. MAINWARING'S MANAGEMENT

A Comedy in Two Acts

BY

JOHN REDHEAD FROOME, JR.

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MRS. MAINWARING'S MANAGEMENT

TIME.—*Last Saturday evening.*
PLACE.—*The Mainwaring living room.*

CHARACTERS.

MRS JAMES MAINWARING.

MR. STEVEN ANDREWS. } *Engaged.*
MISS LOUISE PAGE. }

MISS SYLVIA THRONG. } *Engaged.*
MR. TELFORD BROWN. }

MISS JANE BREWSTER. } *Engaged.*
MR. FREDERICK LIECESTER. }

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MRS. MAINWARING'S MANAGEMENT

THE SETTING.—*A living room of simple, comfortable and habitable luxuriance and home-like appearance. An air of subtle happiness pervades the atmosphere. There are flowers, pictures, photographs, bric-a-brac and pillows, etc., in almost reckless, careless confusion. Double door rear center leading to hall. Door left leading to the dining room. Table center with lighted lamp, whose rays are soft and brilliant. Books, magazines, paper-cutter, etc., on table. A chair, an armchair, to right of table, and close to it. To left of table is another chair, but far enough away to allow the passage of a person between it and the table. Up right is an open desk at right angles to rear, with back towards the door. A small chair is in front of the desk; on the desk is a telephone. Several other easy, comfortable-looking chairs are right and left. Up left may be a book-case, piano, or fire-place, with chairs in front of it. At rise of curtain the stage is empty. Then the telephone bell rings. There is a pause and no reply. The bell rings again, and before it stops* MRS. MAINWARING *enters left and before she gets fully into the room she turns in the doorway.*

MRS. M. Just a moment, Sophy. I'll tell you

what to do with that as soon as I answer the 'phone. (*crosses to desk, singing softly. Takes off receiver*) Hello. Yes,—Oh, Jimmy, is it you?—Well?—Can't come! Oh, Jim, you *must*. What'll I do without you? It's too late to get some one in your place, and— *Can't* you make it in time? It'll simply *spoil* the whole dinner—Well, I suppose it can't be helped, but I'd like to be within speaking distance of these directors and their special meeting, I'd manage—(*changing manner and laughing*) Well, I *would* manage. This thing of business at all hours of the day and night, too, is more than exasperating. —Well,—by eleven then. Good-bye, dear.—Oh, Jim. —Pshaw, he's gone. (*works receiver-hook*) Main 30, please,—Jimmy? Yes, this is Marcia again.—(*laughing*) Jimmy,—er—ah—Caruso and Destin sing in Aida Wednesday night and——

(LOUISE *appears in rear door, hands behind her as if fastening a button. Waits for* MARCIA *to finish.* MARCIA *doesn't see her.*)

MARCIA. (*continuing*) I'll take the seats for then, please.—(*laughs*) I think I'm safe.—Well then, you'll have to get busy mighty quick. But I won't keep you. Awfully sorry you can't come now. Good-bye again. (*hangs up receiver and sighs, rises and crosses left*)

LOUISE. Marcia, dear.

MARCIA. Oh, Louise, what a dream of a gown.

LOUISE. Will you fix these two hooks for me, please? Just out of reach.

MARCIA. Certainly. Come over here to the light. (LOUISE *comes down to table*) But, say, the worst luck has——

LOUISE. (*interrupting*) Jane and Sylvia are so busy with their own things, I thought I would run

down here and get you to help me. (*as* MARCIA *fixes the hooks,* LOUISE *toys with things on the table*) Got them all right?

MARCIA. Just a moment. Say, Louise, what do you think?

LOUISE. I think you are a perfect dear, to have this week-end for us girls, and the men here to-night for dinner.

MARCIA. Don't be silly, Louise. There, they're fastened.

LOUISE. Thanks. (*crosses left*)

MARCIA. The worst luck ever.

LOUISE. Why, what?

MARCIA. Jimmie can't be here.

LOUISE. Can't be here? Why?

MARCIA. Horrid old business at the last minute. He thinks all he has to do is to attend to business. His wife and his guests can—Louise, what will we do with the men? They can't sit in the dining room alone and smoke after dinner. It simply makes me—

LOUISE. Well, don't take on so, Marcia. Jimmie probably knows what is best. We will all have to make the best of it. You can manage. Where is your brother Tom. Get him.

MARCIA. Tom is out of town.

LOUISE. Well, it isn't as if we weren't all engaged, you know. We've learned to take care of ourselves so far and——

MARCIA. Well, engaged couples sometimes need more attention and caring for than any other kind. Measles are lots worse after they've broken out. What has the six of you being engaged got to do with it. Nothing.

LOUISE. But, Marcia——

MARCIA. A dinner is a dinner, and no hostess wants her plans broken up at the last moment by anybody or anything, let alone her husband.

LOUISE. But Marcia, *dear,* you know Jimmie always prides himself on your ability—er—to manage things. It seems to me as if you certainly ought to—be—able—to—er——

MARCIA. Now, Louise, don't try to conciliate me, or say anything in extenuation of Jimmie's behavior. It is positively outrageous to me and indecent to all of you. He knew that—(*suddenly stopping, thinking*)

LOUISE. (*not noticing*) It's neither outrageous to you or indecent to us. It's unfair to him. Now, don't worry, the men will understand.

MARCIA. (*abstractedly*) I wonder, I wonder——

LOUISE. You wonder what?

MARCIA. Did you hear what I said on the 'phone about Wednesday night and Aida?

LOUISE. About Caruso and Destin singing?

MARCIA. Yes. I know this has something to do with it.

LOUISE. (*in great surprise*) What?

MARCIA. (*to herself*) I'm almost sure of it.

LOUISE. Now, Marcia, be rational. What has this to do with Caruso and Destin?

MARCIA. (*half laughing*) Nothing with them, silly, but——

LOUISE. Well, then, explain.

MARCIA. (*again abstractedly*) But, still—I don't think he would in a case of this kind. (LOUISE *makes a movement of impatience as if to leave the room*) No, I'm wrong, Louise, it's this.

LOUISE. Well?

MARCIA. Two weeks ago Jimmie and I made a wager. He said—(*happens to glance through the dining room door*) Now, look at that, will you?

LOUISE. What's the matter?

MARICA. There's that girl putting the silver on all wrong. I told her to wait. Come with me and

I'll tell you about it. (JANE *and* SYLVIA *heard to laugh in the hall*) No, here come the girls, you stay here and talk to them and I'll be back in a minute or two and tell you all about our bet.

LOUISE. A bet with Caruso?

MARCIA. (*laughing*) No, no. Tell the girls about Jimmie. (*going out*) Sophy, that silver doesn't belong there. You know I've told you—(*exit*)

LOUISE. Well, I hope the silver and Sophy will bring you to earth again.

(*Enter* JANE *and* SYLVIA *rear.*)

LOUISE. Oh, girls, your frocks are splendid, and your hair, Sylvia, how did you do it?

SYLVIA. Look again, will you?

LOUISE. At what?

SYLVIA. The splendid frock.

LOUISE. (*looking and comprehending*) You don't mean it. That same one? All by yourself? Well, you are clever. It's a dear. Telford will be proud of you.

JANE. (*looking at her own dress*) Well, I hope Fred will be proud of me.

LOUISE. There, Greeneyes, yours is lovely, too.

JANE. Well, it ought to be. But the only thing made over about it was the fuss when Dad saw the bill. But where's Marcia?

LOUISE. In the dining room. She's in a terrible muddle and stew.

SYLVIA. A muddle?

JANE. A stew? What about?

LOUISE. Oh, nothing. (*smiling knowingly*) only one of the men isn't coming.

SYLVIA. Louise, it's not Telford?

JANE. You don't mean it's Fred? It's rather sudden, isn't it?

SYLVIA. Louise, it's nothing serious?

JANE. Yes, has anything happened?

SYLVIA. What will I do if Telford is not here?

JANE. Well if Fred Liecester stays away for any silly reason I'll——

SYLVIA. Louise, I know it's something awful. How can you stand there and laugh when you see— (*her voice breaks*)

JANE. (*sternly*) Now Sylvia, don't cry. Louise, I don't see any sense in this.

SYLVIA. If you don't tell me at once that it's Telford I shall die. I mean I'll die if you do. Is he hurt very much?

JANE. (*thinking of* MRS. M.) Marcia, I'll get the truth from her. (*starts to cross left*)

LOUISE. (*laughing very heartily and stopping her*) For heaven's sake, I'll tell you if you'll give me time.

SYLVIA. (*again on the verge of tears*) Well, we'll give you time if you'll only——

LOUISE. (*her laughter subsiding, and singing a line of "Teasing," goes to* SYLVIA, *takes her face between her hands and kisses her*) No, it's not Telford. He ought to be here any minute now.

SYLVIA. Well—er—ah——

LOUISE. (*turning to* JANE) And it's not your precious little Freddie, Jane, he's too closely watched by you.

JANE. Oh, then it must be Steve.

LOUISE. (*laughing again*) No, not Steve.

JANE. (*fiery*) Well, then, who?

LOUISE. Jimmie!!

SYLVIA. Oh!

JANE. I had forgotten him.

SYLVIA. So had I.

LOUISE. (*serio-comically*) Forgotten! the price of matrimony, the penalty of being a husband—or a wife. The after-math of Mendelsohn. Forgottten!

Poor Jimmie. (*bursts into laughter*) If Marcia only knew.

JANE. Louise, I fail to see the humor of it. I am going to find Marcia.

LOUISE. She is just in the other room.

SYLVIA. (*endeavoring to brighten*) What doing?

LOUISE. Went to show Sophy something about the silver. And went out muttering something about Caruso and Destin and a wager with Jimmie.

JANE. (*wonderingly*) Caruso and Destin and a wager with Jimmie?

LOUISE. Yes. Said she'd tell us when she came in. At first she thought his absence to-night had something to do with it and then decided she was wrong. Say, it's time the men were coming. Steve said this morning in his lett—over the 'phone—that he'd be here early, and it's nearly——

SYLVIA. (*interrupts laughing*) Now, who is worried?

LOUISE. Oh, not worried at all. Just anxious to see him.

JANE. A distinction without a difference in your case.

LOUISE. And yours?—dear? (*laughs*) Well, you stay here in case any of them comes and I'll go in and try to help Marcia. If Steve's first call me at once. (*exit left*)

SYLVIA. If Steve's first we'll not call her at all, just to get even.

JANE. Well, she certainly worked you up to a high state of hysterics. (SYLVIA *is hurt*) There, dearie, I didn't mean anything. The way you show how you care for that man Telford—Now, I love Fred and—ah—I love him but I don't cry about it.

SYLVIA. I always try not to. I hope I'll be able to manage him like Marcia does Jimmie.

JANE. Fiddlesticks, she thinks she does and he

lets her think it. That's the way he manages her. She'd try to manage Jimmie's business if he'd let her.

SYLVIA. Well, Jimmie is splendid just the same, and a model husband.

JANE. That's because of the mutual management. Never any misunderstandings. When Jimmie does a thing Marcia knows, when, where, how, and why he does it.

SYLVIA. And when I marry Telford that's just the way I want him to be. To tell me everything. I know if he ever kept anything from me it would break my heart.

JANE. Well, I am going to know when, where, how and why Fred does anything either before or after marriage.

(*Enter* LOUISE *left.*)

LOUISE. Found her way out in the kitchen superintending the dressing of the salad.

SYLVIA. Managing the salad, you mean.

LOUISE. Managing is good, for it was certainly being done her way. And while I was there a messenger came around to the back door with this. (*holding up a letter*) For (*reading it*) Miss Jane Brewster.

JANE. (*greatly surprised*) What? For me? How strange.

LOUISE. Possibly, another regret from—Fred. (*hands letter to* JANE)

JANE. (*taking it*) Queer. It's typewritten. (*picks up paper-cutter from table and proceeds to open it*)

SYLVIA. Jane was just saying what she expected of Fred when they are married. Louise, do you think Steve ought to tell you everything?

LOUISE. I most certainly do, dearie.

SYLVIA. But if he won't?

JANE. (*has been reading letter and staring at it in blank amazement*) Girls!

LOUISE. What on earth is it?

JANE. Now what do you think of this?

LOUISE. (*excitedly*) What's the matter?

JANE. Of all the strange, queer—Listen to this. (*reads blankly and slowly*) Ask the men before dinner who took Miss O'Neil driving this afternoon, (*repeating*) Miss O'Neil driving this afternoon. Yours for your future happiness, P. S. Please destroy at once.

LOUISE. (*taking paper*) Well, for goodness sake, what can it mean?

SYLVIA. (*crosses and silently reads it with her*)

LOUISE. Who is Miss O'Neil?

JANE. Why, it's that Hazel O'Neil visiting Mrs. Thomas, Jimmie's sister.

SYLVIA. Oh! I met her at the Country Club last Saturday.

JANE. That little delft blue saucer-eyed, bleached-out blond kind that men call sweet.

LOUISE. And do you suppose it can be that one of our men has taken her driving this afternoon without our permission?

JANE. There is no suppose about it. It's there in black and white. What more do you want than that?

SYLVIA. Let's don't pay any attention to it. It may be a joke.

JANE. Joke, your granny's nightcap. Let's see that paper again, Louise. (*reads*) Please destroy at once. Well, we'll certainly not destroy it. (*folds and tucks it in her belt with a determined air*) It's an imposition, that's what it is. An imposition on us.

LOUISE. Yes, our engagements have not been announced longer than four weeks and——

JANE. And they're out driving with someone else.

LOUISE. But what's to do?

SYLVIA. I'm sure it wasn't Tel.

JANE. That's just it. You're not sure. It may have been Tel and it may not. (*looking at* LOUISE) And there's plenty to do.

LOUISE. But, don't you see, we are not sure of anything?

JANE. That's it again. We are not sure but we've got to be. Suppose it was Tel, is that fair to Sylvia? Now don't cry, Sylvia, we've got to think. Suppose it was Steve, is that fair to you? No! Or suppose it was Fred? Is that fair to me? Well, I'll not answer that question now.

LOUISE. And, it's not fair to all of us that we don't know which.

JANE. Again you're right. (*decidedly*) And I, for one, am going to know.

SYLVIA. But, let's be calm, and try to think, as Jane says.

LOUISE. At least let's pretend we don't know anything about it, to-night. We can't spoil Marcia's dinner.

SYLVIA. Yes, it's bad enough without Jimmie.

LOUISE. And, to-morrow will be time enough to investigate.

JANE. Well, I am surprised at you, Louise Page. To-morrow! Huh! and until then allowing whoever it was to pat himself on the back and call us easy. With all due respect to Marcia's dinner——

LOUISE. But, Jane dear, then let's wait until after dinner. We can't quarrel openly in Marcia's house. Maybe by that time it will be explained.

SYLVIA. Yes, let's wait.

LOUISE. (*starting to laugh, and the others look at her*) Girls, why not ask them which? We never thought of that with all of our thinking.

JANE. No, so we didn't, but——

LOUISE. Now, Jane, no buts.

JANE. (*out of patience*) But they won't tell. As soon as we ask them they'll begin to feel important about it and refuse to answer.

LOUISE. (*at dining-room door*) Well, we won't cross that bridge until we come to it. Here comes Marcia. Now, promise, Jane, that until we give the men a chance to tell that we'll not have any trouble.

JANE. Well,—we'll see.

SYLVIA. Oh, I hope it will be all right. Here she comes.

(ALL *seat themselves and try to look unconcerned.*)

(*Enter* MARCIA.)

MARCIA. Well, that's done. Oh, you're all down, are you. The men ought to be here any moment now. (JANE *stirs*) Did Louise tell you about Jimmy?

SYLVIA. Yes, we're so sorry, Marcia.

MARCIA. Well, it is a shame. But, I suppose we can manage some way.

LOUISE. I'm sure he'd come if he could.

SYLVIA. Don't worry about it, Marcia. Your dinner will be lovely just the same.

(*There is a pause.* JANE *has been ominously silent,* LOUISE *apprehensive and* SYLVIA *anxious.*)

LOUISE. Oh, by the way, Marcia. When you went out you were saying something about Caruso and Destin and a wager with Jimmy. What about it?

MARCIA. Oh, I forgot. (*laughs*) It was this. You know Jimmy calls me the boss manager. I suppose it's because he's the boss, and I manage him. Well, anyway. Two weeks ago we made a wager. We bet seats for the Metropolitan Company next

week that in two weeks, ending to-day, that a condition of affairs would arise that *I* could *not* manage.

SYLVIA. And, has there been such a condition?

MARCIA. Certainly not. I've had no end of trouble with the butcher and the grocer and Sophy, and every time I've managed.

JANE. (*has been looking moodily ahead and suddenly starts*) Did he say, Marcia, that a condition of affairs would arise (*taking out note*) or that he would arrange a force of circumstances. (*looking thoughtfully at note so that* MARCIA *can not see it*)

LOUISE. (*noticing* JANE'S *action and perceiving her point*) Yes, did he, Marcia.

MARCIA. Well, I'd like to see him arrange any force of circumstances, as you put it, that I could not beat down. Come to think of it, he did intimate something of the sort, but——

JANE. And this wager is of two weeks' standing, ending to-day?

MARCIA. Yes—but why so serious, Jane.

JANE. To-day, or to-night.

MARCIA. Well—er—ah—to-night, I suppose. But, nothing——

LOUISE. Yes, nothing can happen to-night, when he's not here. Can there, Sylvia?

SYLVIA. Why,—that is—No.

MARCIA. Girls, I don't understand. You seem so concerned. One would think that—(*door-bell rings*) Oh, there's the first of the men. Now, while I let him in, for Heaven's sake cheer up. You, Jane. (*exits hurriedly, rear to left*)

LOUISE. (*jumping up from chair*) Don't you see, Jane, it's as clear as day. It's all Jimmy's doings. The wager. The note. That's why he isn't here. Oh, this is great. (*laughs*)

SYLVIA. Oh, I see it all now. (*but looks as if she didn't*)

JANE. Of course I see. But that doesn't mitigate the circumstances any, does it? Jimmy or no Jimmy, one of them took that O'Neil girl driving.

LOUISE. Yes, but—(*smoothly*)

JANE. Well, we've got to find out. If we don't, they'll be doing something worse the next time, and the next and the next.

(SYLVIA *is listening closely.*)

LOUISE. But we *can* find out. Don't you see? If Jimmy sent the note, why, Jimmie knows who did it. We'll call up Jimmy.

JANE. Very good. But we can't now. She'll be back any moment.—Suppose we tell her what Jimmy is doing.

LOUISE. But, we can't tell her anything, can we? "We're not sure of anything.

(*Laughing heard outside in hall.*)

SYLVIA. Well, here they come.

LOUISE. Now, let's be careful.

JANE. Well, I'm going to treat them all alike until I know which one of them did it, dinner party or no dinner party, wager or no wager.

(*Enter* MARCIA *and* STEVE.)

MARCIA. Ladies, Mr. Andrews. Mr. Andrews, ladies in general and Louise in particular. We have been waiting so anxiously for you.

SYLVIA. (*to* JANE) Oh, I am so glod it is not Telford yet.

LOUISE. (*going up to him*) Glad you're here, Steve.

STEVE. You can bet I am too. Hello, Sylvia,—

(*shakes hands*) and Jane. (*she returns greeting coldly*) Why, what in——

JANE. (*seeing* MARCIA *has noticed*) Why, eh—er—have you seen Fred?

MARCIA. He says Telford and Fred will be here soon, coming in Fred's auto. Now, I'll go out and get things moving. Make yourselves at home, everybody. (*exit left. Before the others can speak, returns*) When the others come let them in, Sylvia and Jane, and tell them about Jimmie. (*exit*)

STEVE. What about Jimmie?

LOUISE. He won't be here.

STEVE. Not at all?

LOUISE. No, at least, not until late.

JANE. Perhaps Steve could enlighten us now.

LOUISE. But, let's wait, Jane, until we can call up Jimmie.

STEVE. Say, what's all this about, anyway? There seems to be something the matter somehow, somewhere. (*looking at* JANE)

JANE. Well, there is, and you'll soon find out, one of you.

SYLVIA. Remember Marcia, Jane.

JANE. (*crossly*) Never mind, Sylvia.

STEVE. But, I say, put a fellow next, won't you? I don't understand this. It's very—(*bell rings*)

SYLVIA. (*to* JANE) Maybe it's Telford. I'll go.

JANE. Well, do. (*exit* SYLVIA *rear to left*)

STEVE. Louise, won't you tell me?

LOUISE. Well, there is a little misunderstanding, Steve, and——

STEVE. Misunderstanding, about whom?

LOUISE. Well, one of you men.

STEVE. Why, what about?

LOUISE. Oh, we'll tell you later.

JANE. (*bluntly and to the point*) Do you know who went driving with Hazel O'Neil this afternoon? I'm not asking if you did.

STEVE. (*completely taken aback*) Why,—eh—yes, er—I—er—ah——

JANE. Do you know?

(*Enter* SYLVIA *and* FRED, *the latter laughing.*)

JANE. (*folding her arms and drawing herself up*) Ah!

FRED. (*quickly looking about*) Is Steve here? (*then sees him*) Hello, Louise and Jane. (*shakes hands with each.* JANE *scorns him but* FRED *doesn't notice*) Deucedly glad to see you.

JANE. (*looking furious*) And I am to see you, Fred Leicester. Perhaps you can tell us.

LOUISE. Wait, can't you, Jane?

FRED. Tell you what?

JANE. Who went driving with that O'Neil girl this afternoon? Do you know?

FRED. (*thinking and smiling*) Why, certainly I know.

JANE. You won't tell?

FRED. Not if you ask me that way.

JANE. You see, Louise, what did I tell you?

STEVE. Well, I'll be hanged.

SYLVIA. Oh, dear, I hope Telford——

LOUISE. (*going up to 'phone*) Well, I am going to call up Jimmie now and get the siraight of this.

FRED. Why, isn't Jimmie here?

JANE. (*joining* LOUISE) If he were we wouldn't be calling him up, would we? Main 30 is the number, Louise. (SYLVIA *crosses to* JANE *and* LOUISE)

LOUISE. Give me Main 30, please.

FRED. (*looking at girls and crossing quickly to* STEVE, *down left*) I wanted to beat you here, old man, so I could warn you. There is going to be the deuce to pay to-night. (*chuckles over the thought of it*) Now, listen! You know who went driving with the O'Neil girl this afternoon, don't you?

STEVE. (*nodding his head and waiting*) Y-yes.

FRED. Well, for the sake of a wager between Jimmie and his wife, don't tell.

LOUISE. (*impatiently, at the 'phone*) Yes, I said Main 30. Main 3-0.

FRED. Now, it will be all right. It's like this. Jimmie has cooked up this mess and has a wager with Marcia that she can't straighten it out. Of course there'll be no end of a row with the girls, and at the same time no end of fun. Marcia doesn't know anything about it, and we mustn't let her find it out.

STEVE. (*doubtfully, and pointing to the girls*) Yes, but won't they reach him now?

FRED. Lord, no, he's not there.

LOUISE. There must be something the matter with this line.

JANE. Give me that 'phone. (*takes* LOUISE'S *seat and works at receiver a little*) Main 30, 30 we asked for.

FRED. (*laughing softly at their predicament*) If Jimmie wins he'll square us with the girls.

STEVE. But, if Marcia does?

FRED. Why, she'll square us. She'll have to.

STEVE. But, how about Tel?

FRED. He's on, too. Jimmie called him up before he did me. Said you'd gone.

(*Bell rings.*)

FRED. There he is now.

STEVE. Well, I'm in for it if you say it's O. K., but we don't want to be too rash.

JANE. (*putting up the 'phone impatiently*) Doesn't answer. Did you ever know it to fail.

(*Bell rings again.*)

SYLVIA. Oh, there's Telford. What'll I do.

JANE. (*sternly*) Go get him.

(*Exit* SYLVIA *meekly and nervously.*)

(*While she is gone the four on the stage hold their positions.* JANE *determined.* LOUISE *perplexed. The men impassive.*)

(*Enter* SYLVIA *and* TELFORD.)

SYLVIA. (*on the verge of tears*) I asked him in the hall and he wouldn't tell.

(TELFORD *looks at the men and then at the girls.*)

JANE. You see again. I told you so.

TELFORD. (*in middle of room*) Hello, Louise.

LOUISE. (*a little more distant*) How do you do, Telford.

TELFORD. And Jane. (*she doesn't reply*) Hello, fellows. (*shakes hands*) I say (*in an undertone*) isn't this a little too deep? If I had known Sylvia would feel so about it, she's really serious, and it's no joke with her.

FRED. Now, it'll be all right, old man.

JANE. Telford Brown, do you know,—did you take that O'Neil girl driving?

TELFORD. Did I? (*looking at the men*) Did anyone take Miss O'Neil driving this afternoon?

JANE. Yes, one of you did, and you know it.

SYLVIA. Oh, Jane.

LOUISE. (*suddenly*) Now, I'm going to have a say. (STEVE *shifts his position*) Will you or will you not tell—what we want to know? (*the men look at each other furtively but do not reply*) Well, then, that settles it. I was going to give you the benefit of the doubt, but when Telford came—and

you act so unbearably—you might at least consider Marcia. What are we going to do at the table. Her dinner table. (*an awkward pause*) Steve, whether it was you or not, I am ashamed of you.

(SYLVIA *commences to cry softly, and* JANE *goes up to her*)

LOUISE. (*continuing*) And you too, Fred and Telford. It's bad enough to have it happen any time but when we are engaged.——

MARCIA. (*entering hurriedly*) All here? Good. Dinner is—(*perceives the situation*) Why, what is the matter? Sylvia crying? Why, Louise, you are angry—and you men—I don't understand. What is it, folks? Tell me. Jane, you at least look calm. Tell me— You've not quarreled?

JANE. It's this, Marcia. We've learned that one of our—one of the—that is, that either Steve, Telford or Fred went driving this afternoon with your sister-in-law's guest, Miss O'Neil. (*the men laugh among themselves*) That in itself was bad enough, if it weren't made worse by the fact that they won't tell which it was. So, you see, we—ah—Did you say dinner is served? Come, Louise, Sylvia dear, we can at least go in. (*they start towards door left*)

MARCIA. But you can't go in like this. You men —I am surprised. Fred, take Jane. Telford, Sylvia, and Steve, Louise.

(*At mention of the first name the girls toss their heads and pass independently into the dining-room in front of the men. The men are laughing and follow them in.* MARCIA *is astounded.*)

MARCIA. Well, this is a sudden turn. I never would have thought that they could have done a

thing of this sort. (*pauses*) I wonder which one it was? At any rate, it's a snarl for me to untangle. Something to manage. Jimmie, Jimmie, if you yourself had planned this! Well, Caruso and Destin and the wager would be yours, for I confess— (*changing manner*) But I will manage it somehow. There's got to be a way, (*going out left*) and I'll find it.

Moment's pause. The men are heard laughing in the dining-room.

CURTAIN.

SECOND ACT.

SCENE:—*The same, an hour and a half later.*

At rise of curtain the men's laughter is again heard in the dining-room. Enter left JANE, SYLVIA, LOUISE *and* MARCIA, *in the order given. The girls with a determined, resolute air. Girls cross to rear door.*

MARCIA. But, girls. don't go like this. Wait just a little while longer. Perhaps I can manage——

JANE. No, you can't, and there's no use trying. It's gone the limit and we might as well leave them.

LOUISE. Oh, it was insufferable. Absolutely intolerable. Such a dinner.

SYLVIA. Oh, I'm—I'm so—Marcia, dear, what can we do? Can't you do something? (*very earnestly*)

JANE. There's no use wasting words about it. We'll go up to your sitting room and stay there.

When they make up their minds to be decent about this, to tell us which one of them took that girl driving, we'll come down and be—civil. But until then——

MARCIA. But, Jane——

JANE. My mind is made up. Let's go, girls. (SYLVIA *hesitates, looking towards dining room*) Come, Sylvia.

(*Exit the girls.*)

MARCIA. (*following*) But let's be reasonable. Let's—(*exit*)

(*More laughter from dining room. Enter* MARCIA *from the rear, crossing hurriedly to door left and exit. Laughter ceases. Enter left* MARCIA *and* FRED, *smoking.*)

MARCIA. (*crossing to right of table*) Now see here, Fred, I think this has gone far enough.

FRED. (*just inside of door, half amused*) I'm very sorry, Marcia. I'll admit, too, that it's gone far enough, but I can't help it. The trouble is I think it's going still farther.

MARCIA. But you can help it. Don't stand up there in that fashion and tell me you can't, when you know very well one of you holds the key to the situation.

FRED. And are you sure it will unlock the door of our difficulties? I mean, your difficulties?

MARCIA. Why, you know it will. I'm nearly desperate over this thing. Such a dinner table I never presided over. I wish Jimmie were here. (FRED *smiles knowingly*) He'd tell you what's what.

FRED. Yes, probably. But where are the girls? (*indifferently*)

MARCIA. Upstairs. Jane is perfectly furious. (FRED *whistles*) and I don't blame her. It's outrageous to think an engaged man takes a girl driving when his fiance does not know it. And then not to tell which one of you did it. I wish you were engaged to me. I'd manage——

FRED. (*interrupting*) Well, I'm going back to join the fellows and finish my smoke. If you see the girls—Jane—you might tell her the fable of Little Bo-peep.

MARCIA. Fred!

FRED. Well, I think they will. Oh, by the way, Marcia, I want to congratulate you.

MARCIA. What for?

FRED. On winning your wager with Jimmie.

MARCIA. How do you know anything about it?

FRED. He told me at lunch to-day. I always thought you exceptionally clever, but don't you think this evening——

MARCIA. Well, thank the Lord, Jimmie has nothing to do with this.

FRED. He has until this evening is over, hasn't he?

MARCIA. Well, yes.

FRED. Then, it might be well for you to see that he doesn't hear about this if——

MARCIA. Well, there are no ifs about it. I am going to manage this thing, somehow.

FRED. Success to you, then. I am going in. When the Bo-peeps come down tell them they'll find their lambs in here. (*exit left*)

MARCIA. (*disgustedly*) Lambs!

(*Enter* SYLVIA *rear from right.*)

SYLVIA. Oh, Marcia, are you here? I'm so frightened and nervous.

MARCIA. Well, that's not going to help matters.

SYLVIA. It's Telford. I love him so, and this nearly breaks my heart. And I am sure from the way he looked at me at dinner he would like to have it over with, too.

MARCIA. Well, he knows how well enough.

SYLVIA. But he says he's promised, and he won't break his promise I know. I think we ought to overlook it.

MARCIA. Well, you convince Jane of that. But we can't stand here talking when we've got to do something. Sylvia, if there's any—(*stops—thinking*) I believe I know how it can be done. (*excitedly*) Let's go upstairs and find the girls. I think I have it.

SYLVIA. Oh, good, have you? How?

MARCIA. Come on, I'll tell you all. (*Exeunt rear right*)

(*Enter, the men.* FRED *first, cautiously sticking his head through the door. Then* TELFORD *and* STEVE.)

FRED. Now don't go and spoil it all. It'll come out alright. You needn't worry.

STEVE. Of course it'll come out alright—perhaps. It's beginning to look serious.

TELFORD. That's what it is, old man. With all due regard to Jimmie and his wager, I think we ought to put an end to it.

STEVE. When I promised I didn't think the girls would take on so.

TELFORD. Neither did I.

FRED. And neither did I, that's just it. They've got no business to take on like this. One would think we were just out of grammar school. If they can't depend on us to do the right thing, then they had better not trust us at all.

TELFORD. Fred, you don't mean that they——

FRED. No, I don't mean that exactly, but I think if we stick this thing out it will teach them a lesson. Jane especially. Why, I'll be led a dog's life if this sort of thing keeps up, and we ought to be glad of the chance to assert ourselves.

STEVE. Well, I see your view point all right, but don't you think it has gone far enough?

TELFORD. Well, I've a mind to chuck it all, anyhow. Confound Jimmie, it's all right for him. He's married and on the other side of the fence. We're not—yet. There will be no making up to do between him and Marcia.

STEVE. Whereas, if we want to climb the fence, we'll have to ask the girls to give us a hand sooner or later.

FRED. There's no use getting metaphorical about it. I thought you fellows were game and in for a good time. Of course, if you want to give in to three girls whose positions are utterly untenable you can, but I am going to stick to Jimmie.

STEVE. For the sake of his wager?

FRED. No, for the sake of Jimmie, and justice to ourselves.

TELFORD. Well, hang his old wager, is what I say, and as for justice to ourselves, I look at that in another light. Why, it's the girls that make the world go round.

STEVE. But it's gossip that makes the girls go round.

FRED. Yes, and then they make us go round.

STEVE. I don't want Louise to think——

FRED. Oh, you fellows make me tired. When the forces are even I'm in for the fight. But, when it's five against one I might as well lay down my little tin spear.

STEVE. That's it exactly. Your weapons are only

tin, and our armor is nothing more than the queen's lace handkerchief.

TELFORD. 'Fess up, Fred, we are on the wrong side.

FRED. And you've the wrong view point. However, are you willing to tell Sylvia who went driving this afternoon?

TELFORD. Well, yes.

FRED. And you, Steve?

STEVE. Yes, to put an end to it. But I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll call up Jimmie at the Club. He's possibly there and ask him to release you from your promise.

FRED. And spoil his wager?

TELFORD. What's that to do with our happiness?

FRED. Well, then, do it. But I pity our figurative hides when we see Jimmie Mainwaring. Call him up, Steve, if you want to. I'm too dry in the throat. I am going out and try some of the aforesaid Jimmy's brandy and soda. Come on Tel, let's drink to the success of Marcia's victory. (*sarcastic and disgusted*)

TELFORD. I'll join you, but mine will be to the ladies.

FRED. Ah, yes, (*very sarcastic*) the ladies. (*starts to go*)

STEVE. Just a moment, what is his Club?

TELFORD. The Neapolitan, Main 124.

FRED. Come on, you ladies' man. (*exit left*)

TELFORD. Hurry up, Steve, or Marcia will catch you.

STEVE. All right, and then I'll call the girls.

(*Exit* TELFORD *left.*)

STEVE. (*crosses to 'phone and sits at desk*) Hello, Exchange, Main 124.

(MARCIA *and* LOUISE *are heard talking in hall. Enter* MARCIA *and* LOUISE.)

LOUISE. I certainly hope your plan will work, Marcia.

MARCIA. Well, it will if you go about it in the right way. If you can't get it out of Steve, and the other girls are unsuccessful—well, it's the only way I can think of. Give you each a trial at your own man.

(STEVE *looks surprised. Carefully replaces the 'phone and crouches behind desk as much as possible.*)

LOUISE. Well, Steve Andrews has gone just too far this time. If you can get him in here, I'll get the truth out of him if I have to drag it out.

(STEVE *raises his eyebrows.*)

MARCIA. Well, that sounds like you meant it. And remember, as a last resort, if he won't tell, give up your ring. That will scarce it out of him.

LOUISE. All right, but I'd hate to do it.

MARCIA. Well, I'm going. Oh, I hope I can manage it. (*exit rear right*)

LOUISE. (*calling after* MARCIA) But how am I going to get him in here. I wouldn't call him for the world. (STEVE *laughs in his sleeve literally*) Marcia, Marcia, wait a minute. (*exit, following her*)

STEVE. (*getting up*) Oh, she will, *will* she? Well, this changes matters somewhat. (*looks at 'phone*) Jimmie, I think you'll win. So that's their game, is it? Wait till I put the fellows next to this. Especially the rings. Fred will go crazy. (*exit hurriedly into dining room*)

(*Enter* MARCIA *and* LOUISE.)

MARCIA. Well, then, I'll call him. (*laughing*) And when he comes in he'll expect to find me and won't think of seeing you here.

LOUISE. Well, hurry, then, I'm getting more squeamish every moment.

MARCIA. And remember, I'll be down the hall waiting for you, and if you fail we'll get Jane down. (*at door left*) Steve, Steve! (*greeted with laughter from dining room*)

STEVE. (*from within*) In a moment. I'm in the middle of a great story.

MARCIA. Well, hurry, please.

LOUISE. Oh dear. Oh dear.

STEVE. Just a second.

MARCIA. All right. Now Louise, don't flunk.

LOUISE. You can count on me. (*exit* MARCIA *hurriedly to rear right*)

(*Enter* STEVE.)

STEVE. Oh, it's you. I didn't think——

LOUISE. No, you didn't think you'd see me, did you? Well, I'm here.

STEVE. Yes, you're very much in evidence.

LOUISE. Now, don't try to be funny, Steve.

STEVE. (*laughing*) Well, it would be funny if I tried.

LOUISE. (*losing patience*) But you're trying now.

STEVE. Then it must be funny. Ha, ha. He, he.

LOUISE. Steve Andrews, stop that, at once. Can't you be a gentleman?

STEVE. Louise!

LOUISE. Well, I mean it. From your actions this evening you are not the Stephen Andrews I used to know. Not the one who asked me to marry him.

STEVE. And the way you look now, you are certainly not the girl I asked to marry me.

LOUISE. Well, whose fault is it, primarily?

STEVE. (*amused at the word*) Primarily? Why, primarily yours.

LOUISE. Mine!

STEVE. Yes, because you made me fall in love with you, primarily, or was it the other way, primarily?

LOUISE. Don't ridicule, Steve.

STEVE. Don't you ridicule Steve.

LOUISE. (*disgusted*) Oh! (*picks up a book and slams it on the table.* STEVE *does the same*) Seriously, Steve.

STEVE. Well, then, seriously.

LOUISE. Will you tell me what I, what we, what Marcia wants to know?

STEVE. And that is——

LOUISE. You know.

STEVE. Yes?

LOUISE. Which one of you took Hazel O'Neil driving?

STEVE. You want me to answer that?

LOUISE. I do.

STEVE. Well, then, I can't.

LOUISE. You can't?

STEVE. I said, can't.

LOUISE. You mean to stand up there and tell me you can't when you know? Do you think that is treating me fair, whom you say you love? Ah, your refusal means that it was you.

STEVE. I refuse to answer.

LOUISE. There, you see. You did, you did.

STEVE. (*breaking in*) you know you did, you stole your mother's tea-pot lid.

LOUISE. (*perfectly furious and beside herself*) Steve! and this is what you call love. You, love! Answer me, isn't it bad enough for you to take her

driving, openly, in the streets where everyone can see you, when everyone knows we are engaged. Isn't that sin of commission sufficient, without committing one of omission, in refusing to tell me it was you.

STEVE. Well, I shall certainly not commit one of submission.

LOUISE. Don't answer me. (STEVE *attempts to interrupt*) Don't speak to me. A sin of submission, you say, well, do you think that sin will be on my hands? No! nor your ring, either. (*pulls it off*) Here take it, and keep it. (*puts it on table*) Thanks for your fitting words. I fling them back at you with your love and my ring. Keep them both, I say. I want none of them and none of you.

STEVE *reaches out without a moment's hesitation, very calmly takes the ring and places it on his little finger, looks at it and begins to whistle.*

LOUISE. (*thunderstruck*) You don't mean that——

STEVE. (*quietly*) Well, you gave it to me, didn't you?

LOUISE. (*more surprised than ever*) Yes, that is——

STEVE. Is that all you have to say?

(LOUISE *does not reply.* STEVE *takes out a cigarette and lights it, smiling to himself.* LOUISE *is too astounded for words and marches indignantly out of room to rear right.* STEVE *blows out the match and looks laughingly after her.*)

STEVE. Fred, I say!

(*Enter* FRED *and* TELFORD *hurriedly.*)

FRED. Work?

STEVE. Splendidly. (*looks at ring*)

TELFORD. I wonder who'll be the next?

MARCIA. (*outside*) Jane, Jane, come down, will you?

FRED. Oh, Lord, my turn next.

STEVE. Well, buck up, old gun, don't let her phase you.

FRED. Don't be afraid, I won't.

TELFORD. Chuck it, I hear them coming now.

FRED. Well, I'm going in to have another bracer before the ordeal. Come on fellows, they mustn't find us here. (*all run into dining room*)

(*Enter* MARCIA *to table, waits for* JANE. *She watches the dining room door. Enter* SYLVIA.)

MARCIA. You, Sylvia, I thought Jane——

SYLVIA. She made me come next. Said she wanted to think of some more things to say. (*very weakly*) I wish that I—I don't know what to say.

MARCIA. Well, say anything, but don't cry, Sylvia. That will spoil it.

SYLVIA. Well, I'll try.

MARCIA. You must. I'm trying my best to manage this thing. (*at door*) Telford, Telford.

TELFORD. (*within*) Me? (*surprised*)

MARCIA. Here a moment, please.

TELFORD. Coming. (FRED *heard to laugh*)

SYLVIA. I hope I won't cry.

MARCIA. Well, you won't, dearie. I'm sure. (*exit rear right, hurriedly*)

(SYLVIA *looks very worried.*)
(*Enter* TELFORD.)

TELFORD. Me? Oh, is it you, Sylvia? I thought —(*suddenly stopping himself*)

SYLVIA. Yes—it's I Telford.

TELFORD. (*noticing her tone immediately assumes a kindly attitude*) Well, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. Telford? (*softly, lingering on the word*)

TELFORD. Yes.

(*A pause.*)

SYLVIA. Telford? (*same tone as before*)

TELFORD. Yes, Sylvia.

(*Another pause.*)

SYLVIA. Telford, I—er—ah——

TELFORD. Yes, Sylvia. I'm listening.

(*Another pause.*)

TELFORD. Well, Sylvia? (*same tone as before*)

SYLVIA. Yes, Telford?

TELFORD. (*almost relenting*) Do you want to see me, Sylvia?

SYLVIA. Yes.

TELFORD. Well,— —dearest?

SYLVIA. (*brightening*) Oh, then you do love me, don't you?

TELFORD. Why, of course I do.

SYLVIA. But I thought perhaps, Telford, that you——

TELFORD. Sylvia, I'll always love you.

SYLVIA. And would you do anything I asked you?

TELFORD. Most anything, Sylvia. (*smiling*)

SYLVIA. Or tell me anything I want to know?

TELFORD. (*laughing softly*) Well, Sylvia, I would ordinarily but—(SYLVIA *sniffles*) now dear,

(*very earnest*) don't let's have a scene, please. Now I know what you're going to ask me.

SYLVIA. Yes?

TELFORD. You're going to ask me who took Hazel O'Neil driving this afternoon, aren't you?

SYLVIA. And Telford, you know you—must—tell.

TELFORD. Why "must," little lady?

SYLVIA. Because, Telford, I love you,—and—(*starting to cry*)

TELFORD. Of course you do, dear.

SYLVIA. And you love me. That's why you must tell me—don't—don't—you—you—see,—Telford? (*weeping uncontrollably*) Oh, Telford, I can't stand it. It's breaking me heart. Please tell me, won't you,—won't you—dear?

TELFORD. (*opposite her at table. Starts at the word "dear" looks toward dining room as he hears* FRED *laugh*) Oh, this is a shame. (*he takes her hand and she pulls it away*) Now listen, Sylvia—sweetheart. I love you dearly and we mustn't let anything interfere, and we won't, will we? (SYLVIA *still weeps*) And you must trust me in my love for you. You do, don't you, Sylvia? (*no reply*) Answer me, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. (*between sobs*) I'll always try, but—but——

TELFORD. Well, then—(*very tenderly*) Now suppose I did take Miss O'Neil this afternoon, (*she sobs louder*) I'm only saying suppose. (*she nods her head*) Perhaps it was through circumstances over which I had no control. Perhaps I was going to tell you this evening as soon as I came and explain it. You see, dearest, it wouldn't necessarily be so bad—if I did. And you see most of all that it wouldn't lessen my love for you, and shouldn't yours for me,—and—and that's all that counts,—so don't you see, Sylvia,—sweetheart?——

SYLVIA. You talk beautifully, Telford, but, but——(*wiping her eyes*)

TELFORD. Yes?——

SYLVIA. But I must know. Jane says—I mean Marcia,—I mean I must know, and you must tell me.

TELFORD. I've told you I can't, dear,

SYLVIA. (*taking off ring;* TELFORD *starts, having forgotten about that*) Then—I—suppose—I shall have to—do it. (*weeping*) Unless you do tell me, Telford,—here's—your—ring. (*she passes back of table and in front of him, almost brushing him, and places the ring on the farthest, remotest corner.*)

TELFORD. Sylvia!

(*But she is weeping hysterically and passes by him to the door. As she does so he reaches out to touch her but refrains. She goes out crying broken-heartedly, softly, with gasping sobs. He picks up the ring.*)

TELFORD. Oh, damn this whole business, anyway. (*crosses to door left*) Come in here, Fred.

(*Enter* FRED *and* STEVE.)

FRED. Is it over? (*excitedly*)

TELFORD. Yes, it's over, completely so, I'm afraid.

STEVE. Did you get the ring? (*noticing him*) Why, Tel, it wasn't as bad——

TELFORD. Yes, it was and I'm sick of it.

MARCIA. (*from hall*) Jane, Jane come here at once.

FRED. (*making a face and whistling*) Another bracer. Quick, beat it, fellows. (*exits hurriedly pushing the men roughly in front of him before they can speak again*)

(*Enter* MARCIA *and* JANE.)

MARCIA. Well, Jane, I'm doing my best to—to manage, but it's up to you.

JANE. (*very angry*) Well,—show him in here. No, you go quiet, Sylvia. I'll call him. (*as* MARCIA *starts to left*)

MARCIA. My goodness, Jane, don't be—be—rude. (MARCIA *leaves quickly, looking back*) Fred Liecester. (*very quiet in dining room*) Fred Liecester, do you hear me?

(*Enter* FRED *bolting into the room, showing at once that he is going to be master of the situation.*)

FRED. Yes, I hear you. So, you're here, are you? (JANE *is completely astounded. Very impulsively*) I've been wanting a chance to speak to you. (*raising his voice*) I want to tell you first of all that—that—I'm—sick and tired of—of—(*losing himself, and then catching sight of her left hand*) Give me back my ring. (*triumphantly*)

JANE. Well, of all the——

FRED. And above all don't interrupt. I've been waiting for the chance to talk to you, alone. There are things I want to find out myself and now you've given me the opportunity, and, and—(*louder and again losing himself and half laughing at her*) and —give—me—back—my—ring.

JANE. Fred Liecester, are you *crazy?*

FRED. Did you *hear* me, I want my ring. You say you love me and then treat me as if I were a—a graft eating politician,—a—a thief in the night, a—a snake in the grass,—a—an anarchist loaded with bombs,—a—a bum loaded with anarchy, a—a (*losing himself again in his excitement*) give me back my ring.

JANE. Fred Liecester, (*almost shouting and raising her right arm. They are back of table to right*)

FRED. (*same tone*) Jane Brewster! (*raising his right arm*) My ringster. (*raising left arm, finger extended and facing her*)

JANE. (*catching his spirit*) Here take it. (*takes off ring*) You lobster. (*meeting him in his actions and demeanor. While his arms are still in the air she puts the ring on table, he watching her*)

FRED. (*nonplussed at "lobster," but recovers, lowers his arms, picks up ring and puts it on*) Aha—a—a—a—. (*folds his arms*) Now, woman—do your—worst.

JANE. You—you—wretch. (*Turns away and* FRED *bursts out laughing; she waits until he subsides*) Now, perhaps you'll be kind enough to give *me* your attention.

FRED. (*saluting*) At your service.

JANE. What do you think of yourself, anyway?

FRED. Why—me?

JANE. (*sneeringly*) A pretty sort for polite society.

FRED. Polite? (*raises eyebrows*)

JANE. The sooner this interview is over the better.

FRED. Granted.

JANE. Now then.

FRED. Well then.

JANE. Will you tell me which of you took that girl driving?

FRED. No ma'am.

JANE. Did you?

FRED. Won't say.

JANE. Did Steve?

FRED. Still won't say.

JANE. Did Tel?

FRED. Won't say again?

JANE. Why not?

FRED. Promised.

JANE. Whom?

FRED. Jimmy. (*tries to stop the word*) Oh,—ah——

JANE. Jimmy! Jimmy?

FRED. Well, Jane, (*hurriedly*) that is—you see——

JANE. Yes, I see. Then all this is that wager of Jimmy's.

FRED. (*hurriedly*) But I didn't say anything about a wager.

JANE. But Marcia did. She told us before you came. I see it all now. She doesn't suspect that this is his doings. I thought perhaps it was but wasn't sure. And now, you, *you* confirm it.

FRED. But, Jane.

JANE. Thanks, Mr. Frederick Liecester, for your assistance. Now, we shall find out, (*to rear door*) Marcia, Marcia, Come here, Marcia.

FRED. (*hurrying to dining-room door*) Come in, fellows, quick. The jig's nearly up.

(*Enter* TELFORD *and* STEVE *hurriedly.*)

TELFORD. Why—what——?

(*Enter* MARCIA *rear door.*)

MARCIA. Oh, I knew I'd manage. Jane, you found out?

JANE. Not yet, but we shall know.

MARCIA. Why, from whom?

JANE. Jimmy.

MARCIA. Jimmy—? I don't understand.

JANE. Yes, Jimmy. Mr. Liecester there, gave it away. (*looks at him witheringly*)

MARCIA. But, how——?

JANE. Your wager, Marcia. Your wager. Don't

you see? Fred said he promised Jimmy not to tell. (TELFORD *and* STEVE *look at him*)

FRED. (*to them*) It slipped out.

JANE. Don't you see, Marcia. It's Jimmy's doings. To-night is his last chance to win from you. That's why he didn't come to dinner. That's why I got this note about the drive.

MARCIA. A note. You didn't tell me you received a note.

JANE. Now, (*as if it were settled*) we'll call up your blessed husband and make *him* tell. I knew we'd find out.

MARCIA. But, let's see the note. (JANE *gives it to her. She opens it quickly*) Why, it's Jimmy's writing inside. "Please destroy at once." Oho-o-o-o-, I see. You thought at the last moment. Now, Jimmy Mainwaring, you've got four women to reckon with instead of one.

FRED. Poor James. (*the men laugh*)

MARCIA. (*as she sees* JANE *starting to 'phone*) What are you going to do, Jane?

JANE. Going to call up Jimmy and find out.

MARCIA. (*rushing after her and pulling her back*) You'll do nothing of the sort. You can't. I've got to find out, to win that wager. Do you think that now, I'm going to let him beat me.

FRED. Bully for you, Marcia.

MARCIA. Jane, you go get Sylvia and Louise. Tell them what we know and bring them here. Go on, Jane.

(JANE *reluctantly goes out, rear to right.*)

MARCIA. And, now, will you men be kind enough to tell me just what you promised Jimmy.

STEVE. Fred, I suppose we can tell that much.

TELFORD. But, you see, Marcia, you've got to straighten out these quarrels as well.

FRED. Well, you see, (*slowly and deliberately*) we simply promised we wouldn't tell who went driving this afternoon with Hazel O'Neil.

MARCIA. Is that all?

STEVE. Yes.

MARCIA. (*thoughtfully*) You—promised—you—wouldn't—tell who—(*thinking*) Oh,—why then,—why, then, you can write it. (*delighted with herself*)

TELFORD. (*seeing a way out of the difficulty*) Why, yes, if that wouldn't be equivocating. You see, fellows, I'm anxious to get this settled. We didn't tell Jimmy we wouldn't write it.

FRED. (*looking almost disgustedly at* TELFORD) Well, let it go at that, then. (*to* MARCIA) But, you're not to tell the girls.

(*Enter the girls,* SYLVIA *blowing her nose. They go down right away from the men, who are left.* MARCIA *is back of table.*)

MARCIA. Girls, I have it. The men have agreed to write which one of them is the culprit. (*men look at each other, knowingly*)

JANE. Write to whom?

MARCIA. Why, to me, of course.

LOUISE. And, will you tell?

MARCIA. Well——

JANE. No, you don't, either. I for one am going to know the straight of this. Does it help matters any to have *you* know which one of them did it? (*men smile at each other*) Oh, you can smile.

MARCIA. (*looking at 'phone*) Oh, this is terrible, Jimmy Mainwaring. I wish I had you here. Let me think. I will, somehow,—manage.

(*There is a pause.* MARCIA *is walking back and*

forth, deep in thought. SLYVIA *looks at* TELFORD *longingly. She meets his eyes and turns away her head. Repeat this twice.* JANE *is glaring at the men and* FRED, *under her look, shifts uneasily as he has his arm on* STEVE'S *shoulder.* STEVE *is looking vacantly about waiting, and* LOUISE *is watching* MARCIA.)

MARCIA. Girls! I have it. Oh, I have it. Will you be content if just *one* of you knows who did it? Jane, it might be you.

LOUISE. Well,—yes.

JANE. Yes, if——

MARCIA. And you men? (*they look at each other*)

FRED. (*looks knowingly*) Yes, for I must confess that I'm anxious to know what you're going to do with this (*sweeping the stage with his arm*) and us. (*pointing to himself and the other two*) Aren't you. (*they nod assent*)

MARCIA. And, all of you, because, this is Jimmy's and my fault, all on account of our wager, will you say that when I have finished that you'll all be—agreeable?

TELFORD. I'll answer for us. We're willing to make any reasonable concession.

LOUISE. But, Marcia, do what you're going to, don't stand there——

MARCIA. Just wait. Now, here, you men give me those rings. (*takes them and puts them on a table in a row, goes to desk and gets four small pieces of paper*) Now, you girls, get in a line, and you men over there, and listen. (*she comes around in front of table and quickly places one of the pieces of paper on it*) I have three pieces of paper and three pencils, and I'm going to give one of each to each of the men, and I want the one who took

Jimmy's sister's guest driving this afternoon to write his name. You'll all have to pretend to write, and then I'll give a paper to each of the girls,—and—don't you see? One of you will know, and, Jane, it might be you.

JANE. (*thinking and half amused*) Well, I'm willing to take my chances on that. (*the men look worried*)

FRED. Alright. It's a go. (*nods reassuringly to the other two*) Say, I'm anxious to see what she's going to do. It's no use for Jimmy to *try* to get the best of that head. (*pointing to* MARCIA)

MARCIA. (*has been fixing the papers and pencils*) Alright. Now let's begin. Now, all turn your backs. (*the girls turn obediently, the men wonderingly*) So. Now, here, Telford, Steve and Fred. (*passes in front of them and gives them each a paper and pencil*) Now, write. And while the men are writing I'll give you girls your rings. (*goes over to them and does so*)

TELFORD. (*while she is on the other side of the room*) Say, what are we going to do about this?

FRED. Leave it to me.

STEVE. All right. (*they smile and begin to write, holding papers against wall* L. *A pause*)

MARCIA. All ready. (*back to her position in front of table*)

FRED. Yes. (*laughingly*)

MARCIA. Very well, then. Now, fold them twice. (*she collects papers and goes to left of table*) Now, all keep your backs turned while I change them about. (*she holds the folded papers up to the lamp, one by one, and discovers the last one has the writing on it. She looks for a place to put it and excitedly and suddenly throws it under the table, and substitutes in its place the other piece of paper which she had previously put on the table, folding it as the*

others are, smiling to herself and humming all the while) All ready. Face about. Here you are, Jane, Sylvia and Louise. (*gives them each one of the papers*) Now, read them. (*she goes back to the front of the table, guarding the paper on the floor*)

(*The girls read, or rather look at the papers while the men watch closely, but as no one reads a name their faces are impassive, and the men look wonderingly.* MARCIA *smiles.*)

FRED. Button, button, who's got the button.

LOUISE. (*changing manner and looking at the ring*) That's for you to guess, isn't it, Sylvia.

SYLVIA. (*very happy*) Really, Marcia, dear, I think we all owe you a vote of thanks. You're wonderful. (*looking at* TELFORD) Oh, I'm so happy.

MARCIA. Well, is everybody happy?

ALL. (*after a slight pause*) Yes.

MARCIA. Then, no votes.

TELFORD. Marcia, it's a beautiful night and the moon's great. My big car's at the door and the river-road home is in fine shape,—and—and would you ask the ladies, please, if they would care to——

SYLVIA. Oh, that'll be splendid, Tel. (*he crosses to her and takes her hands. She is beaming*) I was sure Marcia would manage.

MARCIA. Well, if you want to go to-night, I'll send your things around in the morning.

STEVE. We'll go too, won't we Louise—dear?

LOUISE. Sure. The air will be great. (*she goes to desk up right and* STEVE *follows her*)

FRED And we will too, won't we, Jane,—dear?

JANE. Don't be silly, Fred. (*he crosses to her*)

MARCIA. Now, you girls, go get your things and don't say anything more about it until you get in the automobile, and then—Now, hurry.

FRED. Steve, you bring my hat and coat in, will you. I want to speak to Marcia.

MARCIA. Now, run along folks. (*they go out laughing and chatting, the girls turn right, the men left*)

FRED. Say, Marcia, I think they need you in Washington. *I'm* proud of you. Congratulations on winning your wager.

MARCIA. Why, that's so, I have. (*looking down to see that paper under the table is safe*) I'd almost forgotten that part of it. But, let's say no more about it.

FRED. Except this. (*he is at right of table handling a book*) When are you going to make Jimmy pay up?

MARCIA. Wednesday night for in Aida.

FRED. (*still handling the book*) Well, let us fellows get tickets for the girls, will you, and all go.

MARCIA. Good. A celebration. (FRED *drops book on floor, accidentally, Marcia starts, nervous. They both reach for it and Marcia gets it, at the same time trying to hide the paper. She puts book on table out of* FRED'S *reach*) But wait till I see Jimmy. 'Twas a clever ruse, his staying away, and sending a note. (*anxious to get* FRED *away*)

FRED. But you were too much for him, eh? (*laughing heard in hall*)

MARCIA. Well, good night, Fred, (*taking hold of him and walking him back to the door*) See you Wednesday evening.

(*The others appear in the doorway, all looking happy.* MARCIA *hastens to the table, looking at paper beneath it as she goes, then turns about with her back to the table on up-stage side leaning against it and spreading out her skirts, facing the rest.*)

FRED. Give me my things, Steve. (*takes them*)
MARCIA. Well, good night, friends.

(*The three couples come up and shake hands with her.*)

TELFORD. That's what we are, good friends, now.
SYLVIA. Dear Marcia, I'm so happy. (MARCIA *laughs*)
LOUISE. Good night, Marcia, wish you could enjoy the ride with us.
STEVE. Tell Jimmy we missed him awfully.
FRED. No, tell him that he missed it awfully. (*laugh*)
JANE. Marcia, I feel played out. I'll call you up in the morning and tell you what a good time we've had.
MARCIA. (*waiting until they are nearly gone then following them, looking back at paper*) Good-night everybody. Fred's got some news for you for next week.

(*All go out rear to left,* MARCIA *last with another look at the paper. There is a chorus of good-nights and then the door is heard to close. A silent moment and then* MARCIA *comes almost running in.*)

MARCIA. I was sure Fred was going to see that paper. Oh, I'm crazy to find out which one it was.

(*By this time she is in front of the table and as she stoops to pick up the paper she sits on the floor.*)

MARCIA. Now, we'll see who went driving with Jimmy's sister's guest.

(*She unfolds the paper nervously and reads, with a look of blankest amazement.*)

MARCIA. Why!—It—was——Jimmy! (*bursts into a peal of laughter*) No *wonder* he didn't come home for dinner. (*still laughing*)

CURTAIN.

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